

HOW TO GROW OLD

By

ALICE WOODS, M.A.

Honours in Moral Science, Girton, 1880

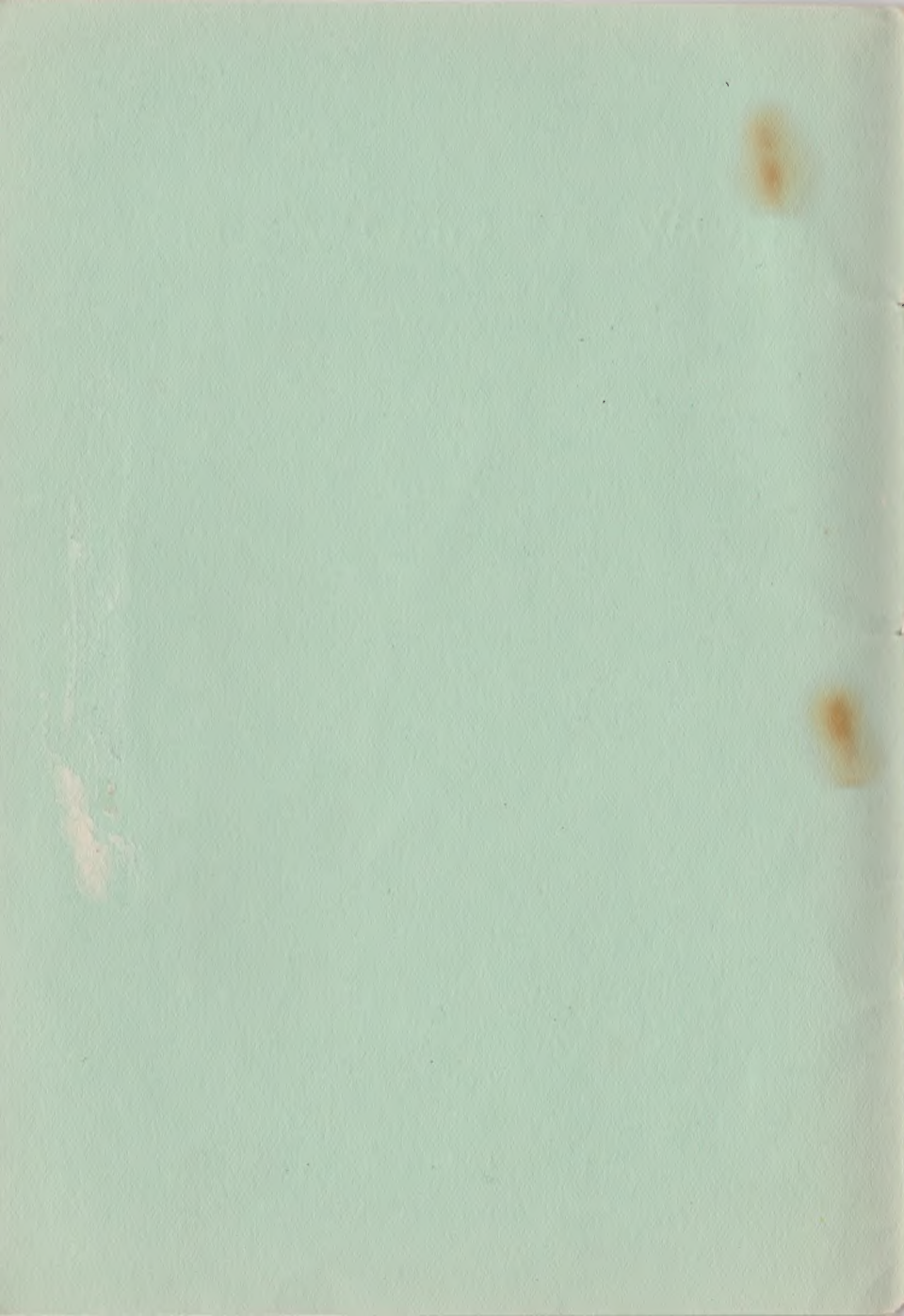
Principal of Maria Grey Training College, 1892-1913

With a Foreword by DR. W. PIGGOTT, M.B., B.S.

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Nellie Freeman
From Alice Woods
1940.

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Eastern Saying.

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FOREWORD

ALICE WOODS, the author of this most helpful pamphlet, is now 91 years old and surely speaks with authority on the subject of old age.

She has worked for high educational ideals all her life and began her career by teaching for two years as assistant mistress in a High School. She then went to Girton where she took the equivalent of an Honours Degree in Moral Science in 1880. After this she returned to the teaching profession and in 1884 became the Headmistress of a co-educational school. She was then, and is still, an ardent believer in Co-education.

Being well known in the educational world, she was chosen in 1892 to be Principal of the Maria Grey Training College for Secondary Women Teachers and for 21 years she retained this post.

In 1913, at the age of 63, she retired. By this time she had many old students both at home and abroad teaching in schools or lecturing in Training Colleges and many of these year after year come back to her for advice and guidance.

She writes this pamphlet as a warning to them to prepare early for old age.

I have watched over her health for the last 16 years as she chose me to help her in her determined fight against the disabilities of old age. I can say most truly that she has preserved each faculty to the best of her ability, and has lived up to her principles that prevention is better than cure.

She has made a point of keeping in touch with the world and with the changing aspirations of the younger generation. I particularly admire the third part of her notes, those on "old-old age," where she makes the wise observation that as we grow older we must view ourselves as "comic characters" and get the young to join us in laughter at our foibles and mistakes. This is a valuable lesson which, I hope, will help others as it will help me.

(Signed) WINIFRED PIGGOTT, M.B., B.S.

How to Grow Old

Written in 1937 and Onwards

By ALICE WOODS

STAGE I

SINCE my old pupils, students and staffs have been the chief interest of my retirement, I should like to set down towards the end of my long life some hints which may possibly help those who are approaching old age to spend it with greater wisdom than most of my own generation have done.

I shall not attempt to deal with women in general, but rather with spinsters who have had some kind of career and who retired about the age of 60 and are likely to have before them an old age of twenty or even more years after their retirement.

This period may be divided into three stages, though by no means always fitted exactly into the actual years.

1. *Young Old Age*, from 60 to 70, which may be called the age of *Preparation*.
2. *Middle Old Age*, from 70 to 80, which we will call the age of *Retention* and *Renunciation*.
3. *Old-Old Age*, from 80 to 90, which for some may be an age of *Endurance*, but as has been suggested to me a far wiser attitude would be that of *Acceptance* and *Adaptation*.

A criticism may be raised here: "We are not really our age by years but only as we feel." Possibly it is so, but each individual can put herself into the stage in which she considers herself to be.

The advantage of this grouping is that we start afresh with a kind of renewed youth, so that we are in a period of hopefulness, looking forward to projects we have had to set aside in the rush of a busy life. Long before our retirement we should have made up our minds what we want to do; what interests to pursue.

In our expected leisure, shall we keep up in some form the joys of our life work, or carry out schemes we have had no time to deal with?

This decade of old age experience is likely to be one in which we are still vigorous enough to do really good work, so that the next decade will depend on the way in which we have prepared ourselves in body, soul and spirit for an old age that is really worth while.

There is an Eastern saying that is very appropriate for every period of old age. It runs thus :—

"Accept conditions, accept others, accept oneself." We shall do well to begin Stage 1 with a full realization of what the conditions of old age are in the present day and how they differ from those of former years.

Our ancestors accepted old age cheerfully with apparent ease. Their women left home very little. Those who could afford it took comfortable journeys in carriages, sometimes with nieces seated with backs to the horses. At home they wore caps from about the age of 40 and sat in special armchairs occupying themselves with books, knitting or some kind of needlework. Sometimes they accepted and enjoyed house-

hold responsibilities, but very often there would be a most faithful housekeeper who took complete charge of every household care, unless her mistress had a fancy for marketing or accounts. Here and there a bold spirit kept up work on outside interests. There were undoubtedly exceptional pioneers, such as Elizabeth Fry in early days; later on, Florence Nightingale, Mrs. G. Anderson, Miss E. Davies, who used their energies aright and helped forward the cause of women.

We should have liked to ask our great aunts and uncles what old age meant to them, but never dared to do so. They seemed to enjoy life and never referred to death. Perhaps this was because, as Stanley Hall, of U.S.A. in his book on Senescence, says: "In old people the habit of living grows so strong with years that it is harder and harder to break it"; or, as the author of "A Green Old Age" has it: "The old cling to life on account of the trouble they have had in mastering it." Our good folk lived on quiet, cheerful and undisturbed, so we never knew how far they realized the conventionalities, the laughable oddities and disabilities of old age.

A later generation, however, wants to meet old age in quite a different spirit. It earnestly desires to understand the conditions of modern life, making use of such energies as are left, and so to live that old age will not be dreaded by those who are younger, as it was by ourselves.

Stanley Hall writes: "The development of a richer ripper old age is one of the sources of hope in our difficult world time. The young should be encouraged to expect and look forward to it. In ordinary middle life we should plan what pursuits and interests, which

we have not had time to cultivate, we can occupy ourselves with in old age."

Two important changes should be borne in mind ; first, we are now-a-days more likely to live to be 80 or even older, than to die at 70. Few of us wish to do this, for the expectation of old age is often harder to bear than that of death. We are apt to say, "I am sure old-old age will not happen to me," but we must accept the possibility of it, and take the greatest pains to prepare for this most difficult period, so that we may have a more harmonious old-old age than that of the passing generation.

We must face facts. The weaknesses of and disabilities of the last stage are not easy to bear by those of us who after the enthusiasm of younger days want to go on leading useful lives though of a different kind. We have to put up with great slowness of thought, of action, and of quick response, whilst books that took us a few days to read now take us as many weeks. There may be sad lapses of memory, of sight and hearing and loss of taste and smell. There is sure to be a steady decline in all bodily powers even if the care taken in previous stages has kept us free from actual disease. In real middle age we should have acquired the habit of laughing at ourselves, for this will carry us through many an absurd mistake.

Whilst it is well to face the painful side of old age for which we have to prepare, we must not forget that there are certain compensations which though not very numerous, may be looked to with a smile. In the first place there is a steady decline in the extreme intensity of the emotions of younger days. To many of us there comes a most welcome loss of the trying self-consciousness of younger days which led us to

suffer acutely from shyness, timidity and reticence, causing us at times even the loss of moral courage. Though there are undoubtedly happy mortals to whom self-consciousness is an unknown experience, many recall acute suffering. Let us hope that the present generation suffers less from this misfortune than preceding ones.

In old-old age there comes some mitigation of the intense pain suffered in childhood and youth by the loss of loved ones. Then it seems as though the life before us stretched as an interminable barren desert without their presence, but when very old, experience has taught us that we do in a measure recover from sorrows and sufferings of all kinds and that new love and new friendships can be ours. George Meredith says: "This is the lesson for the young, that whatever the heart clings to lays it open to grief, of necessity in such a world as ours, and whatever the soul embraces gives peace and is permanent." In old-old age we should be better balanced than in youth. We have so many memories of recovery from the griefs and misfortunes of our past lives that we can solace ourselves with the knowledge of the way in which good came out of the evil and love has never failed us. The older we are the greater is our wealth of precious memories. We are also able to recall the beautiful things we have seen and the delightful people we have met as the years flew by.

Along with the loss of self-consciousness the evil emotions of bitterness, wrath and contempt for others tend to decrease with age. With scarcely an exception all women who have had careers, whether married or single, become more tolerant in old age than in youth and middle life.

Another advantage is the remarkable kindness with which the aged are treated by all whom they meet. Policemen, porters, bus-conductors, shopkeepers and wayfarers, all are ready to lend a hand to the old in every difficulty ; in fact, anyone who shows signs of old age may receive so many offers of help that she fears to lose all her independence. This independence, is, however, respected inasmuch as aged folk are not regarded as contemptible if they are somewhat eccentric, if they abhor "make up," or dress queerly, or are "unfashionable." "Poor old thing! she is old," they will say. That is sufficient excuse!

One great pleasure for old people is that little children welcome and love them. Perhaps this is because gentleness is a quality of both. What a thrill it gives us when a little 7-year old begs to sit next to us at tea! Sometimes even modern young men and women are ready to accept the experience of previous generations, who are only too glad to give advice.

Another mitigation of old-old age is that we are able to look far back in our lives and realize how from infancy to full adolescence we were really preparing for our future careers with its failures and success.

The second point is one we must keep clearly in mind as we go through our stages. It is one that Mr. Wells points out in his book on William Clissold, where he describes his own experience on the Riviera. There he found many really old people still full of energy, spending their time on bridge, golf, tea parties or gossiping calls. He makes his point very clear that, although we are now obliged to live longer than our ancestors, we are *sadly* deficient in accepting our consequent responsibilities.

When we start our first stage of old age with about

10 years before us we must give much attention to the preparation of our bodies for their later period, since our health, usefulness and happiness will depend largely on the way in which we have used the first 10 years.

To reach a thoroughly honest old-old age without pretending what we do not feel, but being *in reality* calm, serene and peaceful, whilst still helpful and not a burden to others, we should spare no pains to make our bodies fit in the first stage to work with mind and spirit. One important preparation in this first period is to take a daily rest either before or after our mid-day meal, beginning with half an hour or more according to the demands of the main work we have undertaken. It will be very desirable also to take a *whole* day in bed once in every 4 or 6 weeks to begin with, but it should be a *whole* day without the excuse of getting up to lunch or tea. This will enable even the most delicate to keep to useful work and even if not spending full time on chosen work it will greatly help them to prepare for the second decade. The great importance of keeping one day in the week free from ordinary work must be emphasized here, for on this point non-Sabatarians often fail, and so do those who are making Sunday school teaching their First Job.

Mr. Stanley Hall in his book on Senescence does not advise an early retirement, because he believes no-one should end a career until the need for going is realized. But I doubt this. Surely we should retire before anyone can say "Poor old thing! She is past work!" Besides, unless there is early departure we shall not have time to take up the enterprises we wish to carry through.

Mr. Hall suggests very wisely that our first duty on

retirement is to have a thorough change of scene. We should take a long rest, doing, if possible, something we have never done before, e.g., going round the world or to friends abroad, or if town dwellers, care should be taken that we learn to know every season in the country, and above all, to have seen an early sunrise in the summer. On the whole it may be wise to leave our present work entirely in its new hands but this must depend on circumstances and especially on the kind of work we have left. Our chief business in the first decade is to prepare ourselves for the next by a restoration of strength in body, mind and spirit. The body should be so prepared that its owner should not be troubled by its demands. With this end in view every abnormality should be faced. Many teachers leave their work with a bad stoop. In that case, by dint of seeking wise expert advice and taking suitable exercises, we could surely be sensible enough to arrive at 70 being as upright as women of 60 ought to be.

In this stage sight and hearing should be most carefully considered. A cure for deformed feet should be begun and the beginning of any form of rheumatism or sclerosis taken in hand. But it is most important of all to prevent trouble with teeth. Many old women of my generation have had severe suffering from toothache even up to 80. It would probably be wise if every elderly person were to get rid of *all* teeth before she was 70, especially if there are any gold-crowned teeth, which are now said to harbour most dangerous germs. Very few people, however, are prepared for such drastic treatment, to which dentists sometimes object, so perhaps it might be wiser to take a milder course and to insist on the removal of

each decaying tooth instead of allowing it to be stopped.

Another important bodily preparation during this stage is to form wise habits of movement, e.g., to get in and out of bed slowly, not doing as a friend of mine once did, who found herself on the floor after too youthful a spring into bed, with the result that it was difficult for her to carry on the chosen work of her retirement.

It would be well also to cultivate the habit of sitting instead of standing whenever possible, and never to encourage the plan of standing for last words with visitors before saying goodbye.

On looking through some old papers I found notes written by me when about 40 years of age, called "Hints for myself in old age." Some may be considered mistaken, others laughable, though some still hold good for the experience of the aged in the third stage, so I introduce them here, whilst we are considering in early old age for what we are to prepare. The first note says "Never make a young life a mere means for my own ends." This was evidently a desire to follow Kant's maxim "Every rational human being is an end in himself not a means to your ends." "Do only which thou canst will to be universal law."

This advice we should do well to follow throughout our retirement.

In the instruction to "cultivate a habit of silence" there is a danger lest in our wish not to be garrulous we may become too reticent and therefore unable to carry out the next injunction: "If the young and middle-aged are interested be ready to tell them of the trial of advancing years." Another suggestion: "Avoid gossip" is valuable. Here Silence might well

come in. The headmaster of a co-education school once gave his pupils this definition of gossip: "Anything said that would lower the person spoken of in the estimation of the listener." There is again a danger here, as a reference to failings may arise from a wish to help those who failed in some way. A hearty laugh at them may be valuable to the hearer, to say nothing of the relief to one's own feelings!

Another need for silence is the caution "Don't tell stories over and over again." Here we might add, "If you find that the story is already known, drop the narrative." More of these pieces of advice will be considered as we deal with the advance of old age, but one that seems absurd must be mentioned. "Have no-one to stay unless I am sure they will like to come." This is to assume an impossible insight into the thoughts and emotions of other people. We must take our chance of their enjoyment or disappointment. It is more sensible to suggest that "We must not expect the young to be interested in everything that concerns us," and "Remember that every generation will learn its lesson in its own way and not in mine." Other advice may be dealt with later on.

If wise we shall not attempt any new physical exercises such as rowing, swimming or motor-cycling, or car-driving. It is true that many a good cyclist may have excellent qualifications for this kind of work, but it is almost certain that after 60 years of age the power of quick response to the unexpected will decline, and we have no right to jeopardise the lives of those whom we drive. If at the time of our retirement we are already expert drivers of a motor-car we can probably go on for several years longer.

But we must realize that very definite help must be given to the development of intellect, or rather to the prevention of too great a decline of mental power which is inevitable to old-old age.

For the preparation of mental and spiritual powers in Stage 1 it is most important to retain our thirst for knowledge, for beauty, and above all to be "rooted and grounded in Love" (or "Fellowship.") and keep before us the aim of *co-operation*. Travel will be one of our greatest helps here. Every year or two we might revisit old scenes or discover new joys. To keep up knowledge we should set aside some time daily for the study of a subject which "conditions have forced us to neglect in our busy working days." This, it is to be hoped, will help us to realize later on what the wise head of a nursing home once told me. She said that of all the old people she had come across those who were most successful in retaining their mental powers were those who have never relinquished their power of intellectual work. Even 10 minutes a day steadfastly pursued might enable us to learn a new language. It is very useful also to keep up games of skill, such as chess, colorito, halma, backgammon, thus being somewhat independent of cross-word puzzles, or patience well suited as they are to many people.

In this first stage we should aim not only at keeping our intellect alive and active by some daily study, but should faithfully set to work to cure any defect that is likely to hinder mental or spiritual progress, or give pain and trouble to those around us. It may be that our writing is illegible. If so, we ought to try to cure it in early old age. In some cases it might be possible to become proficient in left-hand writing or we might

purchase a typewriter and take pains to learn how to write quickly and easily.

If there is any occupation or recreation which no longer appeals to us, now is the time to abandon it, but whatever helps us mentally or spiritually we do well to retain. Cycling for example, might go on to well past 80.

We have now in imagination got rid of infirmities of our mind-bodies. Perhaps we have adopted Mr. Gerald Heard's recipe for a serene old-old age for which we are preparing by our diet, our posture and our deep breathing. One point more should perhaps be mentioned here, though it scarcely seems likely that any intelligent woman will have failed long ago to have made her will. Even with a very small income the making of a will and the appointment of an executor saves much trouble when death comes.

There are still two very serious matters to consider which concern the development of our mind-spirits. Perhaps many of us have prepared for the first of these in our working years. We have already faced with courage our religious attitude, we know exactly where we stand. We may have accepted the religion of our childhood, or completely modified the same, but some of us are still uncertain, and some remain seekers to the end.

It is well in the early stages of old age to look our beliefs boldly in the face and decide how our actions are affected by them. Our religion is not a creed, but a mode of life. It is the harmony that exists between ourselves and the universe. It is the way in which we strive to live up to the nearest approach we can make to the Creative Urge, towards Love, (goodness), Beauty and Truth—the Eternal Verities. We

all believe in some sort of reality that is the basis of our lives. Some of us believe that Love is the greatest of all things imponderable and invisible as many philosophers teach us. Or we may hold that Joy or Happiness is our end and aim. Another view is that of George Meredith, who looks on "service" as our destiny. "Then let it be my choice living to serve the living -if I can be assured of doing service I have my home within." This advice applies specially to those of the retired who are Mothers or teachers or friends of children and are still engaged in preparing the young for the new civilization to which we are all looking forward, and in which our aim is, as already mentioned, co-operation. A realisation of our genuine beliefs will contribute towards the tranquillity of old age.

The second serious matter is another facing of fact. In many cases we are not alone in our retirement, but with Mother, Daughter, Father, Son, Brother, Sister or Friend closely united, with a great dread of parting, and yet we know that we cannot die to order. The time will come when one must go and the other be left. We should not shrink from the pain of considering this possibility. It should be a matter of discussion between us, what the survivor had better do, whether she should live on in the present house or seek a complete change, carry on the pursuits we have enjoyed together or make some alteration.

It may be the lot of any retired woman to live in her family, where her chief job will be to share in household cares, or to be in charge of an invalid. Should this be the case, and she is keen on mental and spiritual development, then at the outset arrangements should be made for her to have some leisure

time daily when quite independent pursuits can be followed. There should also be an opportunity for absolute solitude. No tiresome investigations should ever be made as to details of these independent occupations.

Our first stage seems to have been so fully occupied that we are almost bound to pass on to our second stage without having accomplished all we wished, but enough, let us hope, to prepare us for plenty of work from seventy to eighty, and, in addition, we shall have begun to realize that all we do has for its aim not only preparation for old-old age, but for *co-operation* amongst us all.

STAGE II

AT about the age of seventy we shall have reached Stage II the motto of which is “ Retention and Renunciation.”

We shall very likely have found it impossible to have accomplished all we desired to do in Stage I, for some of us retired at sixty-five or even later. It is, however, hoped that we shall at least have succeeded in training our bodies so well that they give us scarcely any trouble. If the opportunity arises, we shall follow Stanley Hall's advice, and put ourselves in the care of some wise Doctor whose aim is prevention rather than cure. Stanley Hall goes so far as to express his opinion that all retired people should place themselves under medical care until some really valuable guide is written concerning old age. Doctors, as a rule, ignore the subject through lack of the experience they can give to adolescence or childhood, but it is surely conceivable that a group of doctors might make a careful study of every case of their patients of seventy to ninety that they come across, compare notes, and produce a work that would prove the greatest help to the aged.

We should also probably be ready to put into the hands of younger people our retirement work—for we should be prepared to hand over to them our places on committees, retaining only those on which we definitely know ourselves to be useful. This will give us the chance of travel, which can be well carried out in Stage II, as well as in Stage I, for this will help us to develop our spiritual and mental life and nothing

that so helps us should be given up. Thus cycling can well go on to the age of eighty, as already suggested, croquet can be continued even later, and clock golfing can be enjoyed as a recreation, whilst regular gardening and walking exercise is never neglected.

Stages I and II may well allow us to keep some pet animals which certainly help us in this form of development. But we must be sure to train them from the first to go and stay with someone who will look after them in our absences. We may have to give them up as we lose our power of responsibility or from the fear that we grow too foolish over our pets.

Other occupations we can retain as long as we honestly enjoy them, especially music, arts or crafts of all kinds, card-playing, especially patience, reading, whether it be for study, delight or fun, crossword puzzles. We may not have cared for all these but we need not be afraid of changes in our tastes because of advancing years.

Animals may be the joy of some, but neither children nor youth should be forgotten. As former teachers now may be our chance for more intimate intercourse by inviting the young for holiday visits, or coaching them in their difficult subjects. We can have in mind George Meredith's injunction — "Keep the young generations in hail, and bequeath them no tumbled house."

We should throw ourselves into the enjoyment the young take in pursuits that we no longer care to follow, e.g., cinema, wireless, rowing, skating, lawn tennis, hockey. Visitors should have some time for themselves, and opportunities for private reading or writing.

One great point in Stage II will be, however, to share all interests that old and young have in common,

whether games of skill, or out-of-doors pursuits, crossword puzzles, radio sets, politics or charity.

The constant effort to put ourselves in other people's shoes, will prevent us from expecting others to be engrossed in our interests, though we should always seek to guide the young into an extension of their interests.

We must be most careful not to bore young folk with our own hobbies, but youth should remember that old people sometimes like to keep up pursuits that seem rather undignified, such as walking bare-footed on the sunny sands, or dewy grass at sunrise, or even paddling in the sea or river. They should be allowed to do what makes them happy.

Whilst studying the happiness of old and young in Stage II, we should make sure that we ourselves have learned some handicraft, if such has not been wisely mastered earlier, e.g., carpentering, weaving, knitting, cooking, dressmaking, so that there is some occupation on which to fall back when mental powers or eyes fail, or those around us require sympathy and help. Another important matter is that if we have not learned control of *thoughts* we should not let this period pass without an effort to master it.

There are certain tendencies that are very likely to develop about this time. In some cases, especially among men, it is true, though women are not exempt, there is a greed for food. All regard for a wise and scantier diet, as the years pass on, is thrown aside.

There are, however, other greeds besides material ones. Chess or bridge can become almost a mania with some old women, who spend hours at chess clubs, or in solving problems, thus using up energy which might have served their fellows in some useful way.

The greed of self-importance belongs more to Stage III than to Stage II, but the greed of helpfulness is common enough, leading occasionally to meddlingness in the affairs of others.

An able co-educationist once said that the most marked difference he had noted between the boys and girls in his school was the love of helpfulness shown by the girls, and of possession by the boys. This seems to be true all through life. The women who marry fulfil their function in the world when they have both husband and children to help, and are quite lost in this power to help beyond the home should all their children grow up, marry and live far away from them, so that grandchildren are not at hand to claim their aid. Single women consciously or unconsciously have often taken up a career that involves the joys of motherhood in some degree, such as teaching, authorship, writing stories for children or telling them, or any other occupation that brings them into close touch with their fellow creatures, such as medicine, social work research or library work, shop-keeping, dressmaking, hairdressing, and it is somewhat surprising that more women do not earnestly desire that the churches should be thrown open to them and the pulpit and extensive parish work be possibilities and give them choice of a helpful career.

The desire to help, however, may become a real greed on the moral plane, as the desire to drink or eat becomes on the material.

But besides these greeds there is also one rather weak and one rather strong, i.e., the greeds of grumbling and of power.

The first comes in our dealings with our young visitors when we are inclined to grudge them their

great joy in their occupations. Our attitude, as we watch their triumphant skating, or rowing or racing should be "Rejoice, O Young Man in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth," *not* allowing the emotion "Would that I could do this too" to intervene.

There are two ways of grumbling; first an outward one in which the sufferer cares only to discuss his or her own woes, and secondly an inner one in which the luckless victim is cheerful and uncomplaining to the general public but indulges in a multitude of inward swearings and discontent.

Behind the greed of helpfulness, close analysis will often reveal a hidden greed of power, the intense desire to show what can be done in all the work undertaken through strength of will. This is often the greed of the masterful leading to characters very unacceptable in old age.

There are other *greeds* that belong to the *dangers* of old-old age, but one at least may develop in middle-old age, i.e., the greed of possession. Nothing quite satisfies the victim unless it is his or her own. To see and work in some beautiful garden is not satisfying unless it is possessed and to gaze on beautiful jewels is an insignificant pleasure compared to ownership. This greed can take a great variety of forms.

We remember in Stage II that we have as far as possible in Stage I "accepted conditions." Now we must "accept others,"—as they view us and we view them.—The chief definite fact we have now to deal with is that of steady, though possibly slow, mental failure. It may be a loss of power to grip what we read, to reflect, to plan, to frame ideas or to respond to them; or it may be a loss along the practical

thinking line, mistakes made in business, in travelling, in arrangements for visitors.

If we belong to the first class, it behoves us to realize fully the mental slowness from which we are bound to suffer. If we do so there need be no fear of failure. We can learn a new language, make sure of an old one, study mathematics or history or philosophy : work hard at some hitherto neglected art, learn passages by heart, so long as we take all the time that seventy to eighty requires.

If we belong to the second class our only hope is to find kind business friends who will guide us safely through our grotesque mistakes with the patience of a wise teacher, for there is every danger of complete failure by ourselves otherwise.

It is in this period that we have to fight hardest against those conventionalities of old age that still linger.

When, some years ago, a very well-known professional woman died on a lonely walk abroad, one of our newspapers said that no old woman of seventy should be allowed to walk alone. This would mean that the old are to be deprived at the age of seventy, of almost all chance of solitude, which has been described by Sterne as "best nurse of wisdom." "There would be no happy hours spent alone in sketching, no solitary rambles in the country, or cycle excursions, except with a companion, and no theatres or concerts visited alone. Not that companionship should be avoided, but heartily enjoyed in its time.

The fact really is that old people going at their own pace and waiting carefully undisturbed to cross the road are really safer than those who grow careless by placing their trust entirely in their guide.

Independence must not be given up in a hurry, but should not be carried to such an extent that all help is refused, as is occasionally the case with the crabbed old.

Younger people are often pleased and proud to help old ones. There can be graciousness in the acceptance of help as well as the desire to give it.

Another common error is to insist on treating old people as if they were not adults, but had returned to childhood. They are talked to as if they could not think whereas the fact is that they want only time to think.

One other conventionality that has still to be fought is *the strong tendency to keep the truth from the old*. Someone of great age is assured that she will live till 90, 94, or even 100, though smitten by some mortal disease. Doctors, nurses and relatives are much to blame here, for their influence is very great and might be used to help their patients and friends to look forward to the greatest adventure that awaits every human being. The dying often long to make arrangements that they would not dare to mention to their closest friend lest they be considered morbid, but the delight of planning for the good of sister or nephew takes away all fear.



STAGE III

WE have arrived in imagination at the age of 80, and have entered on the most difficult stage of all, in spite of our upright bodies that do not trouble us by disease, and our spirits and intellects prepared for effort.

It is a time when we shall adopt according to our temperaments either the motto "Endurance" or "Accept and Adapt," but in either case we must now learn to regard ourselves as somewhat comic characters.

There are many references to old age both in poetry and prose but the greater number are written by those who never experienced it. We have probably concluded that neither Robert Browning nor Matthew Arnold were true prophets of old-old age. Robert Browning with his easy optimism writes in "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

"Grow old along with me

The best is yet to be,

The last of life for which the first was made."

and in the last line of the poem:

"Let age approve of youth and death complete the same."

With the exception of rare characters, those who reach 80 do not readily accept Robert Browning's hopeful views, but we are still less inclined to take

Matthew Arnold's gloomy expectations in his poem :
 " Growing Old."

" What is it to grow old
 Is it to lose the glory of the form,
 The lustre of the eye?
 Is it for beauty to forego her wreath?
 Yes, but not this alone."

* * *

and after another melancholy verse we get :

" Yes this and more, but not,
 Alas, not what in youth we dream'd 'twould be
 'Tis not to have our life
 Mellow'd and soften'd as with sunset glow,
 A golden day's decline.

* * *

In the last verse we find :

" It is the last stage of all——
 When we are frozen up within, and quite
 The phantom of ourselves
 To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost
 Which blamed the living man."

As neither Robert Browning nor Matthew Arnold satisfy us we turn to George Meredith, who has made in his poetry a study of old age. In a poem called the " Wisdom of Eld " on the mistakes made by some of the aged, Meredith points out that we *might* reach peace in Old Age, if only we would accept the Law of Change as the Law of Nature ; (our Mother Earth), and though declining ourselves, would captain " young

enthusiasts" to go forward to what is new and thus
 "Bring to the world

A vessel steer'd by brain

And ancients musical at close of day."

We get here an approach to Browning's "Best is yet to be," an age of serenity. The result of a well-spent life with fruitful spiritual experience is sketched in the poem "An Ode to Youth in Memory" which might have been called "The pilgrimage of a well-spent life on the mountain of Old Age," in which he shows us clearly that age must have "glad companionship of Youth." This will help us to "Give stout battle with the Shade Despair."

"Deepest at her (Earth's) springs,

Most filial, is an eye to love her young."

We, who have rejected the two important teachers, Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold, may accept Meredith's concluding lines:

"And there" (i.e., in old age) "the arrowy eagle of the height

Becomes the little bird that hops to feed,

Glad of a crumb, for tempered appetite

To make it wholesome blood and fruitful seed.

Then Memory strikes on no slack string,

Nor sectional will varied life appear ;

Perforce of soul discerned in mind, we hear

Earth with her Onward chime, with Winter Spring."

Our views about old age being somewhat satisfied, we now turn to consider certain points in a book "Laughter" written by Professor Bergson, which especially apply to our own condition in Stage III. In this book he devoted a chapter to "The Comic in Character." In this he describes one marked feature,

amongst many others, which leads to Laughter and which we find most appropriate to old-old age when our deeds or sayings are inadaptable to those of the social life around us.

Instances of this are easily suggested. The congregation listening to the celebrated Mr. Spooner, as he wound up the service in a country church by "Now, my friends, I commend you all to the care of the *shoving leopard*," there was a roar of laughter in the church. There was a similar outburst in Rugby chapel when a highly esteemed assistant master walked up the aisle at a Sunday afternoon service with an antimacassar hanging down his back. In both these cases there is a want of conscious adaptability to the susceptibilities of the social life of the assemblies.

We must not forget Bergson's warning that the Comic is independent of the *deeper* emotions. A friend of Mr. Spooner who earnestly wishes that the service should be conducted without a single mistake would *not* laugh, nor would the son of the Rugby master who was either angry with his father for making himself so laughable, or deeply distressed lest the boys should lose their respect for the master they admired.

A father once asked, "How could my children laugh heartily to see a poor old man tumble down?" The answer would be that the spectators were struck by his comical inability to keep upright, and had not the slightest knowledge of either weariness or old age.

A somewhat exaggerated example would be the act of an aged woman putting a door mat on the bed of a coming guest instead of the down quilt required by the laws of hospitality.

When a younger woman begs for the gift of a sheet of notepaper and is presented with some blotting

paper, the still lingering conventionality in regard to old age usually leads the younger woman to remark: "That's exactly what I do myself now-a-days." Had she said "Ah! that's what I shall come to when I'm really old," there could have been a merry laugh, the "Comic Character" at once convinced of her ridiculous inability to adapt herself to the demands of her social surroundings, which expect clear distinction between the two kinds of paper.

A very recent example illustrates these points. A very old "Comic Character" told two visitors that she had shown her usual inadaptability to her surroundings by choosing to sleep in her spare room in order to hear the bird chorus at dawn. She found, however, that she could not get to sleep, lay awake till 3 o'clock, dropped off to sleep then and slept till 6, when the 5 o'clock chorus was over. The listeners joined in laughter at the comic catastrophe, but when the speaker went on to describe her second night and told how she kept carefully awake from 4.30 to 5.30, without a sound being heard and concluded that she was too deaf to hear the birds, there was no laughter. The deeper emotion of compassion for the disappointment of deafness had been stirred.

It is a necessity for us all to try and *fit in* to our surroundings, and it is with Laughter that we should view our own entrance into an "Old-old" time of life in which we are clearly *less* adapted to the usual conditions of society. Yet, for those who have had the common-sense and courage to prepare for old-old age, this is the period when we should be calm and serene, making both mental and spiritual use of our long experience. Week by week there should be an increase in "the power of a right judgment in all

things," so that our advice will be worth seeking by younger people. It may be that one or two more generations must pass before this prospect of a ripe old-old age is fulfilled, but it may be hastened by the correct view of ourselves as definitely "Comic Characters" always apt to make mistakes in the way of adapting ourselves to our surroundings.

It is *we* who are to regard ourselves in this light. We often find it easy to do so, whilst *others* will help us by joining in the laugh, as for instance, when an old woman well over 80 gets a whole week out of her reckoning and calls on a neighbour, whose friend, as she supposes, has left for many days, and discovers that she only left the day before.

Many *forgets* are, however, so serious that it is hard to do anything but "Endure." Such is the case if the forget means a broken promise to a friend, but two less difficult cases may be suggested.

When an old woman forgets every question she meant to put to her oculist she can "accept" the fact of declining mental powers and "adapt" by the fact that she has still some eyesight left, and the sense to visit a helper. Or if an aged person in bed cannot longer tell what kind of birds are trying to get nuts from the lintel of the window she can "Accept" loss of eyesight, and her "Adaptation" can be "How good it is to be able to distinguish heads from tails." If, however, self-Congratulation follows on the point of having "adapted" so well, she can now only adapt herself to the self-importance that is her moral decline.

Another loss in very old age is the loss of friends. Some live too far away for us ever to meet whilst others die one after another leaving us to severe

loneliness. There are, however, almost always possibilities of forming new friendships with younger men and women, whilst the interest in rising generations is seldom absent, and throughout all the stages a love of solitude should have been formed and cultivated.

Granted that we have striven through Stages I and II with success, the Dangers of Stage III are light enough to pass over briefly, and in fact two of them may not occur till quite late in the eighties or not at all.

These dangers which we shall have noted in the lives of our aged relations will probably be more or less inherited by us. We are apt to fancy ourselves far more capable than we really are. This is partly due to the foolish habit of younger people to assure us that they also act in the same ridiculous way that we old folk often do, so that we do not give in with a hearty laugh, but go on believing that we still possess the powers of earlier life. A frank sincerity would be a greater kindness than the concealment of unwelcome facts.

Many old people also suffer from a tendency to imagine themselves very poor, and to think they cannot afford any gifts or pay the usual fees to those who work for them. Others suffer from extravagantly wasting their money, but these cases are rare.

But there is *one* danger that may increase rather than diminish. Aldous Huxley writes of old age, that there is a danger of a development of the sense of self-importance. Vain-glory easily becomes the besetting sin of Stage III. We are apt to look upon our own petty affairs as of paramount importance, being very proud of having succeeded in reaching our eighties with clear brains and power of usefulness to

others. We are thus showing ourselves at variance to the society in which we live and this is a cause of laughter. We may be led to write our autobiographies, or essays which we think good, and find it strange that the public is moved to laughter by them, the fact being that they are not adapted to modern times. Our self-importance suffers a shock, and leads us to the mistake of allowing our emotions to be stirred instead of realizing that it is one instance of our being comic characters owing to the natural lack of balance in old-old-age.

Our acceptance of a motto for the eighties of Life will depend on our attitude towards Life. Whosoever says, as I have heard it said, "I look upon Life as a cup of blessing" will choose the motto, "Accept and Adapt," whilst others say with Fanny Kemble,

"A sacred burden is this life ye bear,
Look on it, lift it, bear it solemnly,
Stand up and walk beneath it steadfastly.
Fail not for sorrow, falter not for sin,
But onward, upward, till the goal ye win."

and perhaps some may add, "The gods may rob us of everything except the power to endure."

What is it that we must all endure as we pass through "old-old age"?

There is almost sure to be a loss of memory, whether it be of books, or people, or events. This natural loss of memory leads to the most absurd opposition to the ordinary rules of our environment.

Two or even three visitors may be invited to stay at a small house at the same time, or the days of the week being confused, an invitation may be accepted on the wrong evening.

"Accept and Adapt" is the motto that will help us in the losses most likely to arise from our environment, whilst endurance may be the sole remedy that comes when we ourselves are definitely failing in body or mind, and because by this time no friend is left older than ourselves who understands the perils and evils of old-old age. All sorts of misunderstandings may arise that Laughter cannot check. These must be endured without fuss. Directly we begin to consider "endurance," however, we realize that almost every example of it lays itself open to the motto "Accept and Adapt," and yet there are bound to be cases in which the grim holding on—which is "endurance"—is all we can offer, when we are misunderstood by those who never had our experience and who insist firmly that they too have the very same difficulties as ourselves, an absurdity only to be dispelled by Laughter.

"Laughter! O thou reviver of sick Earth! Good for the Spirit, good for body thou! to both art wine and bread."

As the eighties pass on it is likely that more and more rest is required, and this should be looked upon as something to be accepted and adapted, not merely endured. It is not a selfish indulgence of old age, but a means whereby tranquillity and intelligence may be maintained, and use made of the energy that still remains.

In all probability Stage III will be the time, with more enforced leisure, when memories of our past crowd upon us. We look back, in wakeful nights or lonesome hours, on our careers, and realize how often there came cross-roads at which one led to our present condition and the other to a totally different

state of life. If not very careful we are off in dream-land considering what we might have done or been had we taken a different road. Or, if this temptation is resisted, we are apt to dwell on our many mistakes and errors, quite forgetting that we humans can advance to a more ideal life only through our blunders, follies, and even our sins.

It is early in our eighties that memories should be faced. All regrets should be silenced, only used as stepping stones to dry land—treated as a part of the “self” to be accepted along with “condition” and “others.” The wise among us will already have lived more in the “now” than in the “past.”

What then are helpful memories?

In the first place the people we have met. It was said by a modern novelist that in old age we should find that we have, one and all, met with four saints in our lives. We shall find them without doubt and do well to remember them and those who have helped us in intellectual progress and idealism, in love, in service and in happiness. It is St. Paul who urges his followers to be “*forgetting* those things that are behind and *reaching forth* unto those things that are before,” and to let our minds dwell on things that are honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report. It will be far wiser than going over and over our mistakes if we “think on these things”; they will include as well as people and friends, all the beautiful places we have been to, abroad and at home, the music heard, the cathedrals visited, the pictures seen, the wonderful sunrises and sunsets, the views, the hills and mountains, to dwell on these should be a habit cultivated through all our stages.

Our memories turn also to the books we have read

especially those that have made a great impression on us. Those who came across the French philosopher Bergson, or the Russian philosopher Ouspensky, will find in their writings; and possibly lectures, opinions appropriate to all our stages in old age.

Bergson holds strongly in his "Creative Evolution" that there were millions and millions of years ago two strands of evolution; one of these ended in a blind alley, and formed the existence of communities of bees and ants, and one led to the human beings of to-day.

To both these philosophers it seems that the present tumult of the world is caused by our arrival at the cross-roads of a new evolution. One road is the road of machinism. The machine is to be supreme, and the master of man, who is but a cog in the machinery of the world. This road leads to a blind alley without hope of advance. The other road is the road that leads to *superman*, to beings so superior to the present that we cannot even imagine them. Advance along this road is unending. It is spiritual instead of material, and for guidance we must look to mysticism, higher mathematics, music, all arts, and the "best rare moments"* of individuals.

Conclusion

These articles have been written because the writer became more and more convinced that a great deal must be done in earlier life to prepare for old age and to fit us into our surroundings.

Amongst other preparations we must take pains to get rid of any eccentricity, or departure from the ordinary rut which cause annoyance to others, e.g., to

* So called by Professor Louis Nettlehip.

express disapproval of afternoon teas, to dress in some peculiar manner, or to refuse to suit the dress to the occasion ; to be too emphatic in expression of opinions and the like.

If scientists are right, who say that we are bound to live many years longer than our predecessors ; and if Stanley Hall and Mr. Wells are right, that the energy of greater age can be used to make our world a better place, then the mistake of the passing generation, of which I am a member, has been that it has not prepared nearly early enough for old-old age, and so has dragged on till ninety, or even later, with bodily, mental and spiritual imperfections.

We are anxiously in the midst of devastating war, what could have been done to have made the world a place worth living in? The answer comes from the thoughtful among us, philosopher or teacher, scientist or idealist, the senior pupils of our public schools or the earnest working man and woman. It is that we have aimed at *competition* rather than *co-operation*, and have thus allowed *selfishness* and *pleasure-seeking* to be paramount rather than *Service*. It is to youth and middle age that we must look for improvement, and in both public and private and in elementary schools we see signs of its coming, as well as in the writings and societies of the day.

Meantime, the young should look forward to an old age which will co-operate with youth, and not wait, as this passing generation has done, to put off the preparation for old-old age till it is already there at eighty or even as late as ninety.

We must indeed go further back to late youth and middle age, for widespread help from all parents, teachers, to graduates and senior pupils in our schools,

as well as the thoughtful working man and woman, to set their minds and spirits on so bringing up their children that fellowship and service should be their aim, co-operation taking the place of competition, not in word only but in deed, not only in homes and schools, but among communities, societies and nations. Many teachers amongst us, who followed our pioneers, living in the later years of last century, strove throughout their careers to bring about co-operation through co-education, in which a co-operation is established between the sexes as an introduction to adult life.

When true co-operation comes there may be in reality on earth a Kingdom of Love, Beauty and Truth, in which all may be thankful to abide from birth to death.



